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SPINDRIFT

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SPINDRIFT

MILTON RAISON



**"Man, whose young passion sets
the spindrift flying . . ."**

MASEFIELD.



Engraved by John Sloan

PORTRAIT OF A SAILOR

What is the saving grace that made him loved,
Written about, and praised where'er he roved?
Truly, I do not know, but seeing there,

His figure by the rail, his eyes to sea,
His red face crinkled, and wind in his hair,
I do not dare deny his majesty.



SPINDRIFT

BY
MILTON RAISON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
WILLIAM McFEE

AND A FRONTISPIECE BY
JOHN SLOAN

NEW  YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

AL 3113.3.107

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**SPINDRIFT. I
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

TO VIOLE

I have the simple need of you,
I have of meat and drink,
Of freedom, beauty, faith and friends,
And lovely thoughts to think.

But you are everything I need,
Faith and food and friend,
And you are fused with beauty
In my thoughts without an end.

I need of nothing on this earth,
Yet I go off to sea,
To seek the freedom that you steal
In dominating me.

INTRODUCTION

BY WILLIAM MCFEE

If memory, backed by the conventional criticism of twenty, thirty, and even forty years ago, be accepted as a guide, the invariable defect of youthful poetry was a lack of simplicity and a sense of direction. One had a tendency, it is remorsefully remembered now, to write of things of which one knew nothing and in a style entirely foreign to the experience and temper of one's age. This, no doubt, was to be expected of young people who lived, for the most part, very secluded lives without telephones, automobiles, magazines, or cinemas; their actual knowledge was microscopic, and the demesnes of their fancy untraversed by the highroads of modern learning. It was the first duty of every guide, philosopher and friend of youth to warn them against writing of distant places and far-off romantic periods, in imitation of Scott and his school. Write of what you know, was the ceaseless cry

of the sage seniors to dreamy-eyed youth, who of course knew nothing and so could not profit by this valuable advice, but went on dreaming and constructing impossible romances (like Shelley's "Zastrozzi") until in most cases they fell in love and discovered things for themselves.

Today, youth knowing everything, the problem is not the same. For them there is no longer any danger of loitering palely in the anterooms of romance. They do not need recalling from fantastic journeys into preposterous principalities, nor are they discovered aping Keats, with his "magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn." There is even a doubt in the present writer's mind whether they ever fall in love any more (in the old foolish, dreamy, meal-missing sense). . . .

And herein lies the interest in modern verse. It may not tell us very much about art or life, but it ought to tell us something about the young people who write it. Whether they know it or not, they are living in a very remarkable age. How remarkable, only those of us know who can remember the 'eighties

and the 'nineties. And while their reactions to this age are not necessarily entirely embodied in verse, there is sufficient demand and encouragement for poets nowadays to accept their efforts as authentic manifestations of the Time Spirit.

For this reason it is to be regretted that so few of these young people reveal any appreciation of the technical problems involved in poetry. So far from resembling a company of polite young romantics gathering posies in a beautiful garden, they convey, in their modern *vers libre*, an unhappy impression of a gang of hoodlums smashing and uprooting, and sinking their heavy heels in the choicest flower beds as they bawl to one another their favorite æsthetic anthem: that they know not where they are going, but they are on their way. If one does not know that, there is nothing to be gained by making a virtue of it. The sleep walker and the anarchist have the same justification for their behavior. One has only to imagine the votaries of any other art proclaiming the same impudent doctrine, to perceive the unwisdom of it. It is highly desirable in all the arts to know where one is going, and

it may even prove a sound policy to halt a while and find out.

In the verses now under consideration the young author has advanced no such foolish contentions. If many modern poets remind one of a noisy syncopating orchestra, these brief pieces are like the clear melodious whistle of a boy on a fine summer evening. It was early discovered by the present writer that one of the most difficult things to accomplish in any art is outline. And here you have it. There is a Latin sharpness of mentality manifested in these clearly, sardonically etched portraits of a ship's crew. The whimsical humor revealed in final lines is a portent, in the present writer's opinion, of a talent which will probably come to maturity in a very different field. Indeed it may be—though it is too early to dogmatize—that these poems are but the early efflorescence of a gift for vigorous prose narrative. This is scarcely the place to go into the intricate and interesting question of literary origins. Some men begin, as did Shelley, by designing enormous and macabre romances and find their true metier in great verse. Some, like Thomas Hardy, achieve fame as novelists and develop

late as minor poets. Others, and these form the main body of literature, sing in lusty minor verse for a year or two, and then, ceasing as suddenly as though their poetic voices had broken, use the prose form for the rest of their lives.

The opinions of men diverge sharply upon the question of the best environment for the development of a man of letters. Milton Raison has settled for himself, with engaging promptitude, that a seafaring career provides the inspiration he craves. The influence of Masfield is strong upon him, and some of his verses are plainly derivative. As already hinted, it is too early to say definitely how this plan will succeed. In his diary, kept while on a voyage to South America, a document remarkable for its descriptive power and a certain crude and virginal candor, one may discover an embryo novelist struggling with the inevitable limitations of youth. But in his simple and naïve poems, whether they give us some bizarre and catastrophic picture of seamen, or depict the charming emotions of a sensitive adolescence, there is a passion for experiment and humility of intellect which

promises well enough for a young man in his teens.

The story is told of one of our greatest living writers, that at the height of his spectacular career, his father could not be induced to voice the almost universal praise. When pressed, the latter admitted laconically that his son's achievement was "creditable." From this position of extreme moderation he refused to be moved.

Here is a very valuable anecdote. There is too much meaningless and unauthenticated enthusiasm in evidence these days. It is highly desirable that the young be protected from dangerous adulation. Let it stand, therefore, in this case as "creditable," and neither poet nor panegyrist will have occasion in future years to regret his modest claims.

W. McF.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For permission to reprint some of these verses thanks are due *Munsey's Magazine*, *The Evening Post*, *The Century*, *Scribner's*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Call* and *The Bookman* and to John Sloan for the use of his illustration for *Portrait of a Sailor*.



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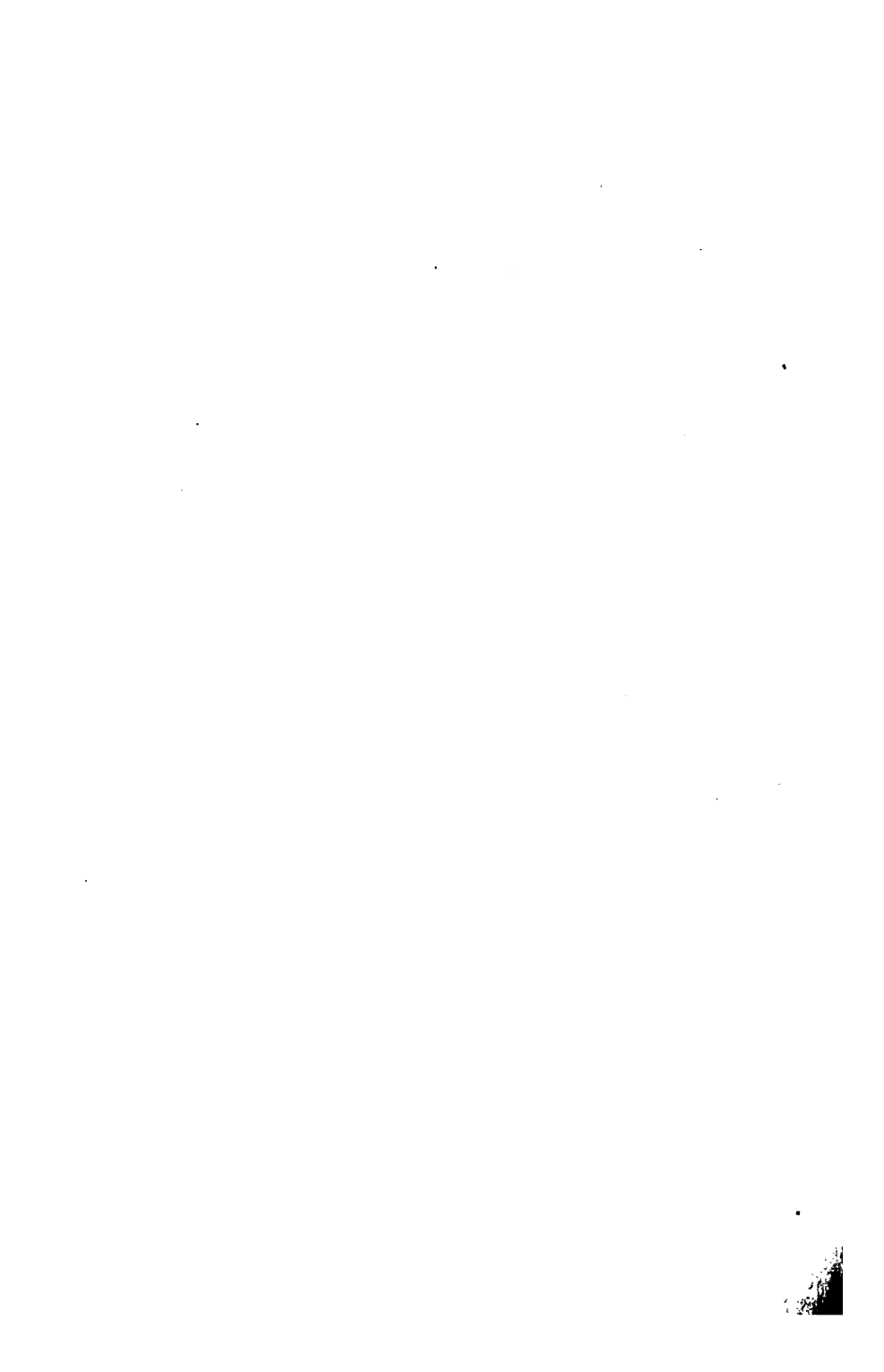
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SEA SKETCHES

PORTRAIT OF A SAILOR

HUMPED o'er the rail, eyes on the
sea he stands,
A filling figure of a man whose
hands

Have never touched an object light
enough

To do it reverence;—the sacred stuff
Of love, forbearance, faith, he never
knew.

And he is cruel in his sportive way,
And cunning in his mischief-making
too;

He has no further use of any day,
But take it as it comes and live it
through.

Grumbling at sea, carousing in a port,
And so again—that circle's his retort
To all the beauty molded out for him—
Strange his keen eyes should be so sadly
dim!

What is the saving grace that made him
loved,
Written about and praised where'er he
roved?
Truly I do not know, but seeing there,
His figure by the rail, his eyes to sea,
His red face crinkled, and the wind in
his hair—
I do not dare deny his majesty.

THE LOOKOUT

HE'D been to sea for thirty years,
And he was tired of tasting
 spray,
Carried by every wind that veers
 Through night and day.

This stuff that salted up his lips,
 And even the marrow in his bone,
Had wet the decks of all the ships
 He'd ever known.

It quenched the sun, and threatened
 stars,
 And filled his world with steady din.
What grander grave for weary tars?—
 So he slipped in.

THE APPRENTICE

SOME men can find a magic in the
 sea,
 And he is one, I know it by his
 eyes,
Sweet with beauty as they turn to me
From gazing ocean-wise.

Yet he's the sort of man the sea will
 cheat,
And for his love and trust will bite his
 hand,
By mustering her vice for his defeat—
But he'll not understand.

THE MESSBOY

HE had contempt that was divine,
For every sailor that he fed,
For while they talked of girls
and wine—
He read.

For while they lived the pain and strife
Their dull imagination brooks,
He could appreciate their life
In books.

He washed the dishes, made the bed,
And did their errands with fair grace,
Nor could their insults on his head
Erase

That fine, immobile pride of his
Which brushed against their baser
sod,
And was as different as a kiss
Of God.

THE CAPTAIN

THE captain was a silent man
Who never said an extra
word,
He'd watch the sea for quite a span,
Nor let himself be heard.

It's queer that such a man as he
Should find himself so strange a
friend,
And be companion of a sea
That talked without an end.

THE OLD WIPER

HE doesn't know a thing about
The engines that he wipes and
cleans;

The ships he'd been on sailed without
Machines.

For all, he hopes they'll never make
Until he leaves the human race,
Some sort of engine that would take
His place.

THE CHEATED MATE

THE captain was so deadly drunk,
He wanted to caress a wave,
And so they strapped him to his
bunk,
And left him there to rave.

The mate who wished the captain died,
So his command the ship would be,
Thought that the captain if untied
Would jump into the sea.

He loosed the cords that held him down,
The captain though, was crazy-strong,
And as he climbed the rail to drown,—
He took the mate along.

THE CHIEF STEWARD

THE seamen hated him because
He sent back aft the rotten
meat,
And all the half-cooked food there was
The passengers refused to eat.

So since he wasn't fit to live,
And anxious for the common weal—
They threw him overboard to give
The sharks at least, a decent meal.

THE CREW'S COOK

THE smallest man among the
crew,
And yet the one most looked
up to.

We help him coal his fire and peel
The vegetables for every meal;
We listen to his tastes, nor voice
Among us a dissenting choice.

We hate his foe, and love his friend,
And lock his secrets in our hearts,
Praying Davy Jones to lend
Us solemnness to play our parts.

There is a reason for our fear:
With heat, or rage or too much beer,
And carving knives so close at hand—
Cooks have been known to run amuck;
And those they didn't like would stand
A likely chance of being stuck.

The smallest man among the crew
Is thus, the one most looked up to.

THE SHIP'S BUTCHER

HE is preposterous, yet he is sym-
 bolic
 This thin, bald figure strutting
 in his striped
 Apron and jacket that he boasts "I
 swiped";
 And his appearance turns the crew to
 frolic;
 "Just look at him, the bloody fool who
 wears
 That piebald rig-out to his bloody work,
 Bleeding the pretty colors when his dirk
 Cuts through the rotten meat—put-
 ting on airs!"

But through this mocking, he maintains
 a face
 Defiant with smiles; at each insult he
 bows
 With most elaborate courtesy and grace.
 And though this clash of mockery al-
 lows
 A mutual exchange of "Go to hell!",
 The more effective is not hard to tell.

THE CHIEF ENGINEER

HE was aristocratic, tall and grim,
And had a distant, unconcerned air
That made us think he really didn't care
About the things life brought in touch
with him.

We never saw him read, nor write nor
talk,
Nor listen, for that matter, all he did
Was lend his person as a silent bid
Unto our company. At times he'd
walk

Timidly on the deck, deep in a thought
Apparently, that made his footsteps
halt,
As though his very motion were at fault,
And out of tune with one so calmly
wrought.

He didn't seem to care about the ship,
And for the sea—he never watched it
twice;
Nor was he bothered by a single vice,
Or worry that would make him bite his
lip.

Such a person set our wonder free,
And we were undecided whether he
Was merely stupid, or a mystery.

THE NIGHT WATCHMAN

WHAT does he know of the sea,
this ancient man
Who spent a scattered life-
time on her ships?
Who trod her ports, where fellowship
began
On hearty footing mid her sons, on sips
Of liquor, and her daughter's painted
lips.
What does he know of the sea, and the
storms that lashed
Their course of fury with a million
whips,
And the waves that slid beneath the rays
and dashed
Themselves to spume against the wind
and hull?
Surely he must know unforgotten scenes
When painter-skies mixed color in the
sea.
But when I see him seated, bent and
dull,
Small, gleaming eyes upon the shoes he
cleans
For passengers—it stays a mystery!

BAFFLED

THERE was a dreamer and he
knew no jest,
His mind was dull to banter-
ing and quips—
But those black eyes of his that flashed
like whips,
Curled out to beauty; he was beauty-
blest,
And his two feet could only find a rest
When they had brought him out to watch
the ships,
To lick the salt that clustered on his lips,
And breathe the ocean-wind with newer
zest.

So he went off to sea to flee the laughter
On land, and soon on ship there spread
a rumor,
“The new kid hasn’t got a sense of hu-
mor,
Let’s fool with him”—And teasing fol-
lowed after;
And so the dreamer, baffled at his duty,
Jumped overboard in search of mirthless
beauty.

THE BEACHCOMBER

HE fell upon us as we came ashore
To spend our money with the
feel of land
Again beneath our feet—and almost
tore
Our clothes in his delight to clasp a
hand.
We were the first white men upon the
sand
Of this damned beach, he purpled as he
swore,
He'd seen for half a year;—then he
grew bland,
Suggested drinks, and steered us to the
door
Of some dive where the finest whiskey
sold,
He said, and where the fun at night be-
gan.
It gave him keenest pleasure to grow
bold
On drinks—and yell to all he was a
man;
Meanwhile the barkeep smiled and
thought of when
He'd have to throw him out of doors
again.

THE SAILOR SINGS

WHAT do I want of a home and
love,
When I have the sea, and the
sky above,
And a smiling woman wherever I rove?

What do I want of faith and peace,
Or the mellow to age as the years in-
crease,
When I'd rather my youth would sud-
denly cease?

For what is life when youth is over,
And what is love to a faithless lover,
And death to a careless rover?

AT SEA

THIS is the scene, laid out for
splendid things:

The night is tropical, the moon
is veiled,

A soft wind fans our ship on, and we
sailed

Through velvet seas; a languid billow
swings

Against our hull, and trickles back to
sea,

The stars shake like a wind-tossed can-
opy.

The seamen line the hold where I sit too,
Expecting some adventure I could tell,
Some deviltry let loose among the crew,
The memory of which would serve me
well. . . .

But passively we listen to a bore
Who prattles on the merits of a whore.

THE HOLD

THERE is a treasure trove aboard
all ships,
That gathers beauty to its
ample fold,
Like a huge goddess with kind, smiling
lips:
We sailors know it as the after-hold.

The sun spreads on its top a cloth of
gold,
And there, the spare hours in the day
we spend;
We play our games, and have our fun,
and lend
A mortal aspect to the silent hold.

At night we gather on its boards and
sing,
And sprawl around and talk of life
and death;
And what a wealth of narrative we
bring!
What song rides forth on agitated
breath!

And there are wondrous cargoes in its
deeps,
From silks and furs to simple ballast
sand.
The air of musty memories it keeps
Is opened to us every port we land.

Somehow I feel, when we're asleep be-
low,
The stars come down to dance upon
the hold,
A ghastly moon makes whiter than the
snow
That covers it like fur when it is cold.

I like to lie upon the hold and watch
The lovely squirmings of a restless
sky—
And see a star go out, just like a match,
And wish my soul went that way when
I die.

SEARCH

I KNOW there is a harbor in the dusk
Where beauty is inseparable from
all

The seemly aspect; in the gentle fall
Of evening there's a strangely pungent
musk

From faery creatures quartered in a stall
Behind the battered quays that mourn-
fully

Lie mouldering in the foothills of the
sea.

Llamas, gnus and lions, and elephants
tall,

These phantom beasts of my desire will
be,

Subjects of the most ornately wild
Equestrian visions that ever came to me,
To grace the fancy of a dreamer-child.
Yet everywhere I come, I cannot find
This harbor that I somehow leave be-
hind.

SEA MOOD

I SHUT my eyes, and I can see
How once we all sat on the hold,
And sang the songs that memory
Had not permitted to grow old.

We sang in seven different tongues,
And each tongue had its separate
tears,
While some would sigh to clear their
lungs
Breaking the harmony for our ears.

And when we'd stop, some Swede or
Dane
Would swing into his own folk song,
Then clear his throat, and tell again
Why he left home, and just how long.

Or looking at the sea, with eyes
That saw none of the swells and
spray,
The scullery-kid who grew man-size
Amid us, told about the day

He ran away from home to find
What greater things the earth con-
tains
Than cities filling throats with grind,
Slit through with narrow, crooked
lanes.

Then as the hours grew late, we'd take
Our last look at the milky way
That sprawled across the sky, to break
The blue, to something one could
pray,

So great it seemed, and we would gaze
A length upon that holy sight,
Then go below in separate ways
To clinch the silence of the night.

THE MOON AND THE SHIP

THE night was a woman with stars
in her hair,
And the crescent moon was her
mouth;
While her breath was the wind from
the south,
That came from those smiling lips so
rare,
So brazen, so arch, as to cause one de-
spair
Of ever appeasing his drouth
For such beauty that followed one
everywhere.

The ship was a giant with curly, white
hair
That gnarled on his chin and cheek,
And his breath had a salty reek.
Limbs now in the water, and now in the
air,
He swam for the joy of it, not caring
where,
Nor anything did he seek—
But followed the wind with a snort and
a flare.

The night shook her hair and the stars
fell out,

(You could dip them up with a spoon)
And to make the round, red moon,
She puckered her lips in a charming
pout. . . .

Then the giant looked up with a startled
shout,

And he turned to the maddest loon!

He put all the frolicking waves to rout
By his rushing, careening and pitching
about,

To kiss that mouth . . . nearer . . .
soon! . . .

Like a seagull that flies . . . and flies
. . . and flies . . .

It had scenes with clouds before his
eyes—

Brushed back the stars from its velvet
way,

And disappeared at the break of day.

Lo! I found myself standing by the rail,
And the ship was beneath me as hearty
and hale

As ever it seemed,

So I knew I had dreamed.

THE GOBLET OF LETHE

THE sea is a huge philtre where is
 blended
 Poisons, compounded out of
 vice, extended
 To all the men for whom the world has
 ended.

Yet far from being noxious, there is
 beauty
 In this dread mixture, beauty beyond
 reason,
 Subtle, as the coming of a season,
 Stately, as the dying of a day,
 That passes o'er the waters, paying duty
 For all the splendor that it leads away.

There is the tang the smell cannot resist,
 And to the eye, the shades look exquisite,
 The senses tingle to a dewy mist
 That rises from some under-water moor-
 ing,
 And sets one wondering what spell is it
 That makes the proffered philtre so al-
 luring . . .
 To find that those who drink of this
 love-potion,
 Forever seek the bosom of the ocean.

VALPARAISO

THE mountains are like crouching
camels
And you, a toy between their
feet,
And though your insolence untrammels
The anxious confines of the street—
You have no other way to creep,
So on the hills your climbing's done.
You'll never find the sea asleep
Like crouching camels in the sun.

CERRO AZUL, PERU

(From the Ship)

ONE would dismiss you with a
shrug and smile,
Quite scornful of your specu-
lative worth—
Call you a God-forsaken bit of earth,
But I would pause to watch you for a
while.

What do I see? The ocean's fingers
clutch
Frantically at your cliffs, hand after
hand,—
But grasping only bits of trickling sand
That must feel puny to so grand a touch.

Your mountains suck the color from the
sky
At twilight, when the ocean loses hers—
And merge majestically amid the blurs
Of clouds and mists that swirl before
the eye.

The sun is lost at sea, after it had
Foundered on the horizon for a space;
It sank with such a well-attended grace,
I knew clean wonder like a little lad.

And where it sank, a sword of light ap-
peared,
That floated on the water as we rolled,
The virgin moon then slipped her veil
and cold
White stars into the shaded heavens
steered.

There is sufficient beauty here for me,
To keep me humble an eternity.

THE LAST NIGHT

I SHALL be lonesome for you, ships
and sea,
And many are the nights I'll lie
awake,
Straining my ears to hear the water
break
Against the hull that kept it back from
me.
Watching the ship's nose split the wind
that bled
Fine spray on deck and me and every-
thing;
The daring moon dance up the sky and
shed
Her many-colored veils in clambering;
The nude sun, shorn of rays dive in a
wave;
The burly clouds swinging their hordes
to storm—
These things I may not see before the
grave
Again, but certain I shall ever warm
To their remembered beauty—yet not
above
The beauty of the one who waits my
love.

FOG

FLOWING in its sombre, sluggish
beauty,
The river lay under the spell of
the mist;
Squatting barges, squarely-built and
sooty,
Lost their angles in the amethyst
That veiled the ancient, long-enchanted
sun.
Bridges spanned the stream like things
untrue,
Or spiders' webs glittering with the dew.
A ship returning from its far-flung run
Crept up the river as though it had been
snared;
Doleful sirens sounded through the haze
As though the fog had crept into their
throats,
Why does this beauty come so unpre-
pared
To break into the pattern of the days—
Forgetting men, to drift among the
boats?

VISION

HAVE I forgotten beauty, and the
pang
Of sheer delight in perfect
visioning?

Have I forgotten how the spirit sang
When shattered breakers sprayed their
ocean-tang

To ease the blows with which the great
cliffs rang?

Have I forgotten how the fond stars
fling

Their naked children to the faery ring
Of some dark pool, and watch them play
and sing

In silent silver chords I too could hear?
Or smile to see a starlet shake with fear
Whenever winds disturbed the lake's re-
pose,

Or when in mocking mood they form in
rows,

And stare up at their parents—so se-
date—

Then break up laughing neath a ripple's
weight?

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS

**Gift of the people of the United States
Through the War Reliefs Campaign
(A. L. A. - War Reliefs - U. S. O.)
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine**

H. M. L.

THERE is no other man I know,
 Resembling a schooner so,—
 Staunch and slight with grace-
 ful spars
That sway against the steady stars.

He has as keen a scent for beauty
As the schooner has for wind,
And as noble sense of duty
As a sailor who has signed
On a ship he loves so much,
There is a softness in his touch.

Like a schooner in these things:
There's the sense of peace he brings,
Like the witching hour at sea
When the tangled dusk flies free;
Then a sweet security—
He would reluctantly go down
Letting those who loved him drown;
He would never lose a mast,
Or be ungraceful in his acts,
Nor would he hold you down to facts,
Nor your imagination fast—
Like the kindly ships that seem
The rendezvous for truth and dream.

**There is no other man I know,
Resembling a schooner so.**

BROTHERS

I NEVER saw your face before,
And probably will not again,
Yet in the glance, I saw that more
Was given you than other men.

I recognized your like to me,
The troubled eyes, the pallid skin,
Yet more of you I would not see
Because we are so much akin.

TO A FRIEND

WHAT will you know of me
when I am dead?

I do not ask because I am concerned,

Nor yet with sudden wisdom is that said
To puzzle you, who are profoundly
learned;

But just half-humorously as I've lived,
And with a crooked smile upon my lips,
For how this startling query is received
And what remorse or sympathy it grips
In you, who've known me through
these many years.

And then you'll think: you've never
known my tears,

My thirsts, my loves, my little tragedies,
My little colored days of grey and
blue—

All that you've known of me did but
appease

The calm, unruffled, thoughtless side of
you.

THE SILENT

I

SHE was as fragile as silence,
And her beauty was as far-reach-
ing.

Her wiles were profound as the quiet
That creeps on the city at midnight

Her very presence was formless,
Intangible, confidence-breeding.

But one felt all this could be shattered
With a single resonant word.

She, being woman, was subtle;
Speech, she claimed was futile—
So walking the longest while,
We did not say a word
That would provoke a smile
Or bring us quiet fears.
She thought such talk absurd,
There was no need to jest,
No need to probe to tears;
Silence between us was best,
The pregnant silence that hovers
In the eyes of lovers.
But I know, being wise,
If we do not use our breath
On talk, but just our eyes—
We will soon be bored to death.

But she, being woman, was subtle,
And that was sufficient rebuttal.

THE CABIN PASSES

BEAUTY and love and tenderness
 and joy;
 These things our Cabin knew.
 Why, it was dressed
 With such an eye for seemliness, ca-
 ressed
 With such solicitude, decked for scope
 In such a lovely manner! Heaven and
 hope,
 And wistful fumbings for the truth and
 right,
 Grew out of day to crown a perfect
 night.

This room contained our souls, our
 thoughts that rose
 In questioning; and how we searched
 for those
 Elusive things called love and wealth
 and art!
 This room that knew our secrets of the
 heart,
 That felt our pulse-beats on its airy
 breast,
 That measured our footsteps, gave the
 body rest,
 Contained all kindly things to give us
 ease—
 Passes now into a long decease.

And we have many memories to keep:
The magic of a love-consorted sleep;
The mellow music clinging round its
 walls;
The breathless waiting for the other's
 knock,
The running to the door, the opened
 lock,
The swift embrace, the happiness, the
 peace,
The love that watched the jealous hours
 increase,
And begged the deep-toned clock its
 striking cease.

So beauty fades, and so the days grow
 cold
The nights grow lonely; all we built,
 destroyed.
And we ephemeral mortals who have
 toyed
With such elusive things as love and
 art—
Take these passings woefully to heart.

SONGS

I

IF I could win you back with song,
I'd write you verse the whole day
long;

Or win your favor on my knee,
I'd stay so for eternity;

If daring acts would please your eye,
I would devise brave ways to die;

And if you wanted me your slave,
I'd curl my backbone like a wave;

But if you tired of all these thing,
And all my petty pamperings,

My heart would flutter like a dove,
I'd lay my lips upon your glove,
And try to win you back with love.

My parting with you seemed to me like
this:

While I was walking in a sunny street,
I heard a tempting tune, so wondrous
sweet,

I straightway pursed my lips as if to kiss
And poured my whistle with the music's
flow.

And there were times it seemed to me
as though

I only, made that music; what a bliss
To think that I was harmonizing so!

But suddenly the music stopped, and
left

With my poor, puny whistle, so undeft,
So purposeless, I halted quite bereft
Of fantasy and sound. And now I
know

You were the lovely music that I heard,
And my companionship with you, the
whistling,

And when we parted I was like a bird
Who has discovered that he cannot sing,
And has been doomed to be forever
dumb,

With tragic eyes to watch the springtime
come.

My lady's face is like the moon,
Her laughter like the sun at noon;
Her hair is thick and long and sleek
Where sullen lights play hide and seek;
My lady's teeth are like the spray
That scampers from a billow's way,
Her form is graceful as a ship's
That rides the waves then stately dips,
And curving like a schooner's bows,
Her lips smile neath a dainty nose.
Her breasts as round as melon's rind
Are soft as sails filled out with wind;
Her skin is softer than the feel
Of corn-floss that we used to steal
To smoke in barns, (now I must see
To touch her skin as stealthily)
My lady's eyes are like a cat's
That is compassionate to rats;
Her voice enfolds the sweetest trill
I've ever heard or ever will.

I tell you that my lady love
Is rarer than a purple dove.

TWILIGHT MOOD

I THINK there is no greater thing
than dusk
That steals shamefacedly around
the town,
And peeps between the buildings, look-
ing down
Upon a world grown dim. It doesn't
frown,
Nor does it gather grandly as would
musk
Upon men's senses;—just a slender tusk
Of color, curving silently between
The day and night; a droop of wings
scarce seen.

SPRING STEPS

THE sun came up and set the
 street
 A-clatter with a thousand feet,
 Some purposeful, some hurrying,
 Some too judicious, some too fleet,
 Some eager what the day would bring—
 Perhaps a birth or burying,
 Perhaps the first spring bird would sing
 And set good fellowship a-swing;
 Perhaps some youth would lose his
 dreams,
 Perhaps some two should never meet
 To stage their little act of Spring—
 Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . and all this
 seems
 A-clatter in a thousand feet.

RHYTHMS

U PON the pillow lies my head,
Under the blankets lies my
torso;
The one seems motionless and dead,
The other more so.

I do not move my limbs nor flick
An eyelash as I wait for sleep,
But slowly, subtly, tick on tick,
The rhythms creep.

The east wind rattles on the panes
With an uneven sort of beat,
And I must listen how it rains
With pattering feet.

The clock ticks loudly in the room,
Incessantly and manifest;
Like darts of sound shot through the
gloom,
It pricks my rest.

My heart beats on its ribbed wall,
Thump—thump—thump—thump—
And does not seem to cease at all
Its rhythmic jump.

My breast heaves with my steady breath,
In and out, in and out,
In goes life and out comes death—
(O turn about!)

Then I remember if I prick
My heart, my breath will also cease,
My ears will deafen to the tick,
And I'll have peace.

But thinking of a way to die,
I quite forgot that rhythms creep
To twist my rest and mind awry—
And fell asleep!

MY LADY'S LIPS

MY lady's lips are like a wander-
ing bee
That does not know where
next it will alight;
My face, the flower's poised expectancy
Watching this breathless, undecided
flight.

Then suddenly your lips swoop from
their height,
To kiss me in some unexpected place,
Till languid thrills, increasing in their
might
Tingle through my hot, bewildered face.
Then like a laden bee that drowsily
Has had his fill of nectar from the flower,
Your lips creep from my mouth reluc-
tantly;—
Only to seek again within the hour
This respite from a passion that in-
creased
So subtly, when the magic contact
ceased.

PEERS

PIERROT and Pierrette,
I've never heard your legend yet;
I've watched you dance at mas-
querades
With less romantic men and maids;
And your caprices on the stage,
Your heartbreak on the printed page
Has always been a mystery
With an alluring history
I've never traced unto the end,
And never shall, for I intend
To ever let myself coquette
With Pierrot and Pierrette.

THE DEATH OF A MISTRESS

SLOWLY she sips the poison from
the cup
And flings it crashing to the
marble floor;
That is her last insult to Fate, no more
These graceless outbursts at the sum-
ming up.
Then languidly she lies back on the bed
And most adroitly bares her knee and
breast,
Sets a coquettish angle to her head
So those who find her in her final rest
Shall feel the lure of living flesh, the
breath
Of breathless possibilities—not death.
Then artfully she takes great pains to
close
Her lips like petals on a drooping rose.
She shuts her eyes, and curls her arms
about her—
So even after death no one may doubt
her.

CLAIR DE LUNE

MALIGNANT moonlight flows
across the trees,
And burns a golden circle in
the grass—

While crouching back in fear to let it
pass,

The shadows harbor black monstrosities.
The sky pants with the stars—hot
things to hold—

And broods his vengeance on the mother
moon:

To twine his clouds around her neck of
gold,

And fling her fainting in some dark la-
goon,

Where taunting waves can scar her per-
fect face,

Or to the winds, where like a toy bal-
loon,

A sportive breeze can blow from place
to place.

But no, she is triumphant in her grace,
And holds the strongest wind for but a
tune,

The blackest pool a spot to flick her
lace.

THE MAD BARBER

WHEN he came home that night,
his throat was choked,
And prickly with the bits of
inhaled hair;
His hands though scrubbed, would mercilessly bear
Up visions of the greasy heads he
stroked.
He sat and thought of how his patrons
joked
Upon his silence and his dreamy stare—
Coarsely jibed his silence, he could tear
Their scalps apart for that! and straight
he poked
His fist into the air, and clenched his
teeth.
How he hated all the men he shaved!
And anger crowned his forehead like a
wreath
That grew more crinkled as he cursed
and raved.
He thought an hour, then began to
gloat—
To-morrow, he would cut his boss's
throat.

BLACK SHEEP

I AM the black sheep of my family,
And why I am, I never really
knew,
Although I half suspect at times, it's
true—
But still it seems a bit of mystery.
The things that keep me so are hard to
see;
Not concrete facts like one and one
make two,
But subtleties that scarcely came, but
grew
Enough to send me over hills and sea.
Of course I am not understood, for when
I try to stammer what my reasons are
Before the questioning of sober men—
I am not clear, as if my thoughts were
far.
And though at times I cry before I sleep,
I'm rather proud the folks call me black
sheep.

TO VIOLE IN ANSWER TO
HER SONNET

DEAREST, I wander long, and
you long wait,
Until my eyes are visioned
with the grace
That lies enchanted in a foreign place,
Where beauty poses massively in state,
Where skies are weighed so low with
golden freight,
They lean against the mountains for a
mace;
Where stately trees wear leaves like
ruffled lace,
And life's a byplay with the sisters Fate.

Yet everywhere I drift, you keep a-
pace—
Your face peers from each lovely thing
I see,
The lovelier the thing, the sweeter face
Unfolds to lure me back . . . but it
may be
At some too poignant beauty I shall start
For home, too late—and find an empty
heart.

“THESE BE THE LOVELY
THINGS”

THE flight of formless beauty
through the grass,
The sudden gleam of silver on
a blade,
The dancing golden motes that slowly
pass
Deathward—the final plunge into the
shade;
The rustling trees like far-off tinkling
glass,
Or sounding temple bells of tempered
brass,
The last gleam of the sun against a
cloud,
Or at the dawning, when it slips its
shroud;
The full-blown sails on swiftly gliding
ships,
With prows as shapely as a woman’s
lips;
Or caught in stone through long, immo-
bile years
The attitude of some immortal daugh-
ter—
A woman’s body built like curving
water;
These be the lovely things that grace the
spheres.

RONDEAU

I WOULD not care about the things
That life in passing by us flings
In cynic mood, those bits that
make

Us scramble in their scattered wake——
Important to our saunterings

Throughout this world; and what it
brings

Is simple meat and drink. Where sings
The beauty of the hill and lake,
I would not care.

I'd be content to tear my wings,
And to soft music's echoed rings
I'd dull my ears—if I could take
Your body softer than a flake
Of snow; let after fall the stings,
I would not care.

TO SOPHIE

THERE might not be a single
thing
That comes up in the life of
men,
Old truths, new depths, I wouldn't
bring
To you, and muse them out again.

I would be certain of your thought,
Unswerving, clean and womanly—
Save when soft, sudden hours wrought
You pliant, and more humanly.

And then I would be thrilled with you,
Made more elusive with your doubts,
While all the woman in you knew
I loved your puckered brow and pouts.

MY LADY LOVE

MY lady love is like a rambling
house
In this: where, like black-
hooded brooding mourners,
Squat a scattered horde of nooks and
corners;
My hand steals like a hesitating mouse
To seek those cozy places; some are
warm
Like her pockets, hair or rounded form,
Some are cool and tingling like her
cheeks;
In some, a separate, familiar odor reeks,
Like her breath, perfuming both her lips,
More stimulating than the smell of
ships;
Or in her hair where musky odors lie,
Like the smouldering incense in those
tombs
Where ancient queens were buried when
they die—
Keeping their romance young with
such perfumes.

FEAR

I SHALL come to you in the dark
 some lonely night,
 And lie down by your side and
 look toward where
Your head should rest in the pillow of
 your hair.
Then shall I know that you are out of
 sight,
And no matter with what fear and with
 what might
I strain my eyes—I shall not see your
 grace;
I shall not see, though I shall know what
 white
Petals your breasts are, above which
 blooms your face
On the lovely white stalk of your form;
 but though
Your untouched beauty urges me to
 stay,
I shall arise quite silently and go—
For you in the dark will be too far away.
And I who know you so well in the light,
Shall be afraid to seek you in the night.

TO MY LADY

THERE is more comfort in your
 slightest touch
 Than in soft-colored, placid
 sceneries,
Or in the gentle motion of the seas
Rocking the ships like cradles of tired
 men.
The peace your cool skin brings to me
 is such
That robbed of you I shall not feel
 again
There is more beauty in your curving
 lips
Than ever lingered in the poise of ships,
Than ever grew in music or in flowers;
And I can sit and watch your face for
 hours,
Listening as you raise your voice from
 where
Amid deep, soothing harmonies it lies,
Touching your hand and playing with
 your hair,
Finding new lights and colors in your
 eyes.

PEACE

THERE'S no eternal peace on hill,
There's no eternal peace at
sea,
And I shall seek for peace until
I shall no longer be.

I'll clamber up the mountainside,
I'll turn my vision oceanwise,
I'll search the country far and wide,
Until I shut my eyes.

I'll see the silent river run,
I'll watch the stately forests burn
Their twilight moment with the sun,
But I shall only learn

There's no eternal peace on land,
There's no eternal peace on wave,
The only peace I could command
Is in a narrow grave.

EARLY VERSES

I

REVERIES OF A VIOLEAN
NIGHT

I

HOW soft she is, so soft it seems
She would be crushed against
my breast,
So standing by, I crave and fear,
And let my eyes convey the rest.

II

O wind!
Shake not that form which cowers from
you;
Hold to your trees,
And blend your reeds to kiss the river's
bank.
But her—pass her by,
For I may be tempted
To grasp her from you,
And let her quake against me,
In my arms.

III

A sweet, sweet face 'mid a mass of hair
As dark as a starless eve,
And the plead of an eye, to stifle a sigh
With a kiss in tender retrieve.

The plead of an eye, and the world
 seems fair,
 Though the winds blow bitter and cold,
 And I give the truth of the love of a
 youth,
 When love is all that I hold.

IV

O shapeless one,
 Why do you flit before my eyes,
 And mock me with a thousand forms?
 Your face which freezes then which
 warms,
 And takes an arch surprise,
 To see me plunge bewildered on
 To trail one fleeting form of thine,
 But find mirages, bright, divine,
 To soothe the tears that realize
 You are gone.

V

You try to chat in care-free tone,
 Yet every jest conceals a moan.

VI

I asked to know you,
As well as other knew,
To make your thoughts in jealousy my
 own.

Still,
How sweet it is to ask and not to know,
To crave and not to grasp,
And place you more in mystery
With dreams as I would have you,
In eternal doubt.

VII

I fold you with my gaze and muse,
Perhaps some night I'll hear you play,
And thrilling notes with banner hues
Shall clothe me in enthralled array.

But shall that music equal you,
A clinging serenade of love
That peals from out the night and dew,
The wind and trees and clouds above?

FORGET-ME-NOT

THE love that died has never died
at all,
Forgotten nights can never be
forgot,
While ivy leaves still cling upon the
wall
By which we plucked that lone for-
get-me-not.

The world has given judgment past re-
call,
“He has forgotten as we all forgot.”
But still I see an ivy-softened wall,
With red lips on a blue forget-me-not.

SONNETS TO A YOUNG LOVE

I

NIGHT after night, I've sat here
 all alone,
 Striving to form a poem out
 of you—
 My thoughts of you, that gradually
 grew
 As wildly lovely as an archbacked roan,
 Against the sky, nose quivering, mane
 wind-blown;
 But I have never seen that poem
 through,
 Nor penned the glad-eye worship that
 I knew,
 Which you may have suspected, but not
 known.

At times I lose you totally, at times
 I have the insolence to grow annoyed—
 But when I think you over in the night,
 And strive to put my thoughts to lyric
 rhymes,
 Remembered beauty leaves me over-
 enjoyed—
 And I feel much too futile then to write.

There is one sonnet that you'll never see,
Though countless pages in your praise I
scrawl,

That sonnet is the loveliest of all,
So sweet, that it is painful unto me.
I hide it from you not through jealousy,
(Nothing is too sublime for your pur-
sual)

Nor yet because it shames me does a wall
Loom over it in full security.

But it may cause your anger or your
smile,

A poor wan smile that pities me, a fool!
Or it may cause you pain, or tears to
start

From out your eyes, like white ducks
from a pool;

So I keep it hidden for the while,
Written in blue veins upon my heart.

In all my drifting through the years to
 come,
In all my loving and my being loved,
Amid strange women, where my fancy
 roved
To smoke my thoughts with their kiss-
 opium—
One picture, like a precious art of Rome,
Carved in ivory in my brain removed,
Shall prove again as it has often proved:
New loves are fickle, newer kisses foam!

Though it reveal us bodily apart,
That picture is the holiest of all,
Where seated on the hill, your bended
 thrall,
Sun-sprinkled by the shaken leaves that
 dart
Dark shadows on your hair, and while I
 sprawl
Beside, you read and build a worded
 wall.

Your face peers from each lovely thing
I see,
Plucked flower, or pink-painted evening sky,
Sun-powdered pool, or rainbowed butterfly,
Dew-drenched, and frightened from a shaken tree;
Or purple passages of poetry,
That lead to where the hidden temples lie,
Reveal the altars where men weep and die,
Self-sent for women to eternity.

And then I think how futile Nature is,
And Man in striving now to reproduce
The masterpiece she aided him to mold;
She, the mere model who had posed for his
Sculptoring of you, Her hair blown loose,
And wind-poised while her face was beauty-bold.

Because you thrust my heart into my
throat
By your unconscious presence in the
street,
Whereon the gutter sun and shadow
meet,
And float up buildings as the hours
float—
No more my love shall hem you like a
moat,
Where castle-like you stand and drench
your feet,
Nor trace your moods with ever-restless
heat
To learn your whims and fancyings by
rote!

For one day you may draw a trifle near
To where I am, and touch me with your
hand,
And look at me half-boldly and half-
shy—
And then may happen what I greatly
fear:
My heart may leap from me to where
you stand,
And blood will clog my veins, and I shall
die.

My loving is beyond you—far beyond.
I did not know that you were but the
 gate
To that far land my dreams would vi-
 sionate,
Until one moment like a silver wand
Revealed you, and with half-closed eyes
 I found
You in your proper unenglamoured
 state.
Now I must seek again my endless
 fate—
New lips to kiss, new waists to clasp
 around.

It seemed through all the music that you
 played,
You were more holy, more to be adored,
Till suddenly your ivory fingers strayed,
And harmonized a wondrous-sounding
 chord,
Too vague to grasp, too deep for any
 word,
But you were lost amid what I had
 heard.

SYLVIA

YOU came from an unforgotten
 past,
 And swept my thoughts to their
 knees

In wonder and awe.

You left them gazing into the haze-grey
 river of memory,

And plumbing deeper.

You sent your radiant coolness through
 my body

And made me shudder, and shake off my
 nonchalance;

You shimmering, silver-surfaced sylph,
 Reflecting heat of other things,

I wonder if your cold, white depths
 Conceal a scarlet spark.

O sylvan nymph, in your hair

Cool forest glens, cool autumn leaves

Echo back their rustlings;

In your grey-green eyes, forgotten
 oceans roll,

And sweep upon the person you regard

Old oriental wreckage, musky-scented,

Curious carvings, queer receptacles,

That bring back the glamour of ancient
 centuries,

Yet ice-bergs seem to hover in the dis-
 tance—

Odd guardians of your warmth!

AGE

THERE are old things that we
have done,
Which come back in peculiar
ways—

When the horizon cuts the sun,
Or even at the break of days;

Sometimes when we lie sleepless in
Our beds, and stare up at the wall,
Tracing some long-forgotten sin
That's unforgotten after all;

Or when we look up from a book,
Whose words pricked some long-hidden
act
Of old, full-measured days that took
Their span of years adventure-racked.

It's then we have a feeling that
We're growing old, and somewhat bare,
That later years have grown too fat,
And taken on too much of care;

Contented to sit idly by
And think of things that we have done—
Gathering our younger years more nigh
Unto us, like a restless son.

PROTEST

WHY do people hide their hands
On such a mellow day?
In pockets, gloves or under
capas,
Or make them a display
Of purses, canes or circling gems?
Must fingers always be,
If not imprisoned, burdened slaves
Of people's vanity?

SPRING LUXURY

THE day is too languid and luxurious,
 And, I like a weary monarch
 scowl

At the trees that bend down to me,
 And the bird-flutes that play for me,
 And the ceaseless rustling censer going
 before me,

Strewing spring-scent in my path,
 And seeming to say: "Bow down to
 him, he is king."

Forever does my treasure keeper
 Count his gold before my eyes
 And pour the splendor out before me,
 And blind me.

And I am weary of the brook,
 That, like a sultan's favorite
 Flashes her silver-silken robes,
 And tinkles laughter at each pebble-jest,
 He throws at her,
 So she may beg gold pieces from his
 treasure hold

And wear them near her heart,
 While her white teeth gleam wantonly.

EARLY VERSES
II
PERVERSITIES

SNEERS

I TELL you,
The World is made of dust.
Even blood dries into dust,
And the ocean to salt,
While the night shrivels to dust before
the dawn.

Men are so much like lice.
They creep over the face of the earth
And through her hair,
And even burrow underground;
Then wonder at earthquakes.

LUNI-COMIC

THE sky is lousy with stars to-
night,
The moon is a running sore
On the body of heaven, that gleams as
white
As the face of a cowardly cloud in flight
At the wind's remotest roar.

The damned trees' branches are palsied
bones
In a weird, spasmodic dance,
Which jumble and hiss in the fiercest of
tones,
That even the moss bristles up on the
stones,
While the ghosts of dawn advance.

PLAY-THOUGHTS

I

I AM confusion—
Oh, not the confusion of ordinary things—
But stay,
Are things ordinary?
I am so great a confusion that I doubt
even my saying.
I am the enormous confusion,
The great chaotic confusion of life—
So immense a confusion, that I doubt
myself,
And my confusing.

And I am the question—
The huge, eternal, infinite question.
I call life a fact—and then question:
Why is life a fact when the very fund-
 damentals
And future of it are unknown?
Then I say: life is a dream—
But if so, who dreams the dream of life?
And so I answer life is darkness,
Stretching, black-born darkness,
And the thoughts and dreams of life
Are but the stars, the little lamps that
 shine
In the darkness,
And only accentuate it,
For *do* the stars light up the sky?
Oh, I am the question! .
And I question men who question me,
And I even question my own question-
 ing,
And ponder at my infinitude.

But *I* am life—

I question the confusion of myself,
And confuse the questioning.

I am the liquid elusive,

For I take the form of my container,
And fit into each mold of thought men
make for me,

Imperfect molds—

That allow me to drip,

Until I form pools of protest and con-
troversy.

I am the paradox,

And I am the axiom,

And I am neither.

AN ATTEMPT AT THE MASE-
FIELDIAN MANNER

WHEN I met her, I wasn't sure
Whether or not she was a
whore.

Her lips looked like an open wound,
As livid, and as ugly-red,
The only live thing in her head,
But badly done and out-of-tuned.
The only other striking thing
Was just the shortness of her skirt.
She looked as though she had been hurt
By destiny; her face was girt
By ancient sadness, and the science
Of ever harboring defiance.

Her eyes were dead, no luster there,
Just ashes, cold and feathery,
The pencil on her lashes looked
Inartful and unweathery,
And dull as if she didn't care.
I watched a while and then decided
That as yet she wasn't booked
For that night, so I confided
That I should like to know her 'cause
I'd show her what a good time was.

And never while I pace this earth,
Shall I forget the hate that blazed

Into her face; she looked half-crazed;
And with those lips she uttered birth
To a hysteric-frozen mirth. . . .
And when that awful laugh was done,
Her voice talked in a bleeding tone.

“Excuse me for my laugh, you’re not
To blame, you’re not the cause of that.
'Twas that my thoughts were far away,
Thinking of another day,
When I was young, and didn’t think
I’d sell myself to every wink;
When innocently I’d no thought
I’d ever be so lightly bought;
Of when I loved young Driver Jack
Who always drove me in his hack
When he’d no trade, and how alone
He’d kiss my flesh hot to the bone;
And how with kisses, vows and all
Was soon accomplishing my fall;
How I left home with bastard in me
With all the parish hot agin me.
He died in gaol where I was sent
When I, on getting food was bent
And stole a bun from a baker’s shop,
Stale, and only fit for slōp,
But still enough to kill a life,
And make me every bounder’s wife.

“I thought of all the fields in May,
The scent and sun that filled the day

With peace and loveliness and light
 That furl'd supremely into night.
 Then the lone cabin by the well
 Where nightly, witches rose from hell,
 And burn'd a circle in the grass,
 Dancing in a frantic mass,
 Riding broomsticks, breathing fire,
 Having feasts in peat and mire,
 Shrieking curses that so dire,
 Scorched the fields around for miles,
 And burn'd down fences, pens and
 stiles.

And how we children watch'd the harm
 That had been done with great alarm.
 (It's true some call'd it fault of gypsies,
 But those were look'd upon as tipsies,
 For didn't John McGully tell Wards
 He had seen them flying hellwards?)

"I thought of me so cute a child,
 So sweet, so gay, so pure, so mild,
 The teacher'd kiss me on the cheek,
 And how with rum his breath would
 reek;

'Twas wondrous grand I did allow
 (Those kisses sell for tuppence now,
 And now it's mixing rum and rum,
 My breath with some unlearn'd bum)
 I thought of all those olden days,
 The childhood days, the golden days,

And for a while forgot that I
Was waiting an inviting eye;
With dreams so sweet, I thought no more
That I was standing here a whore.
When you accosted me it seems,
You shook me rudely from my dreams,
And for the moment I had felt
As if an insult had been dealt.
Thus is my tale, if you'll forgive,
I'll go with you for beer, and live
The night with you, if you'll agree."

She got more money out of me
Than I'd have given any dame,
Just for a tale that sounded lame.

LOSS

YESTERDAY the world was
fairly bright,
And somewhat crisp and biting
to the touch;
To-night the world is just as any night,
And any night does not amount to much.

But that is not what hurts. It is the fact
That brisker days put brisker blood in
me,
And brisker blood is what I've always
lacked,
And what we lack, we gather painfully.

SOMEONE

HE knew that he was doomed, and
so he coursed
Through life a trifle loosely,
and too gay;
But yet his laughter sounded somewhat
forced,
And he grew sad too often in his play.

When those who watched him through
the changing day,
Once asked why he should throw his life
to bad,
He smiled and said, "How can I throw
away
What you have lost, and I have never
had?"

QUERY

I WONDER why
We take the flower she has given
us,
Whether it be forget-me-not,
Or rose, which it usually is,
And crush its petals in a book,
The more ponderous the better,
And bleed the flower on its pages,
So in later years,
We may sniff the crumbled petals up
our nostrils,
And murmur, "What sweet memories,"
As we sneeze.

WISE

HE does not know, and therefore
writes
The detailed ecstasy of love,
Of passion-kisses, perfumed nights,
Of Cupid and the dove.

But I who felt the common kiss
Where common-scented flowers grow,
On such a common night as this,
I cannot write—I know.





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